



January 27, 2022

Honorable Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB165 – Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction**

Dear Chair William C. Smith, Jr. and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill **165** sponsored by Senator Jill Carter which aims to stop the automatic charging of children in adult court in the State of Maryland. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

Our state currently ranks among one of the harshest in the country when it comes to prosecuting crimes committed by children and teens under the age of 18. According to the Maryland Youth Justice Coalition, Maryland law currently mandates children as young as 14 to be automatically prosecuted in adult court for nearly three dozen different offenses. We are one of fewer than ten states that send hundreds of children and teens each to adult court every year. In fact, as you might be aware, Maryland sends more young people to adult court based on certain offenses, per capita, than nearly any other state in the country.

Children and teens who are charged as adults are more likely to receive longer sentences than youth who are charged with similar crimes in juvenile court. This disproportionately impacts Black and Brown communities who are more heavily policed. Racial disparities – fueled partly by children being viewed differently by law enforcement officers due to their background, identity or zip code – perpetuate harsher penalties, erode community trust and undermine the goal of rehabilitation.

Over the last fifteen years, 26 states have amended their laws on the automatic transfers of juveniles to adult court after extensive studies and research have revealed the harmful consequences of these policies. We believe it is past time to add Maryland to that growing list.

Key findings of national polls conducted by Data For Progress indicate that a majority of voters across the political spectrum understand that young people have the capacity to change, and want the justice system to rehabilitate young people, rather than imprison them for life.<sup>1</sup>

Research on trauma-informed practices shows that trauma and toxic stress indelibly impedes cognitive development in children and teens.<sup>2</sup> Youth fall within a distinct developmental group that has unique needs and challenges, and there's only a critical window of opportunity for meaningful intervention and positive reinforcement.

CAIR's position is that treating children as adults simply does not improve public safety or help keep our state especially in the long run. Excessively punitive measures interfere with their ability to mature and grow in a healthy, productive way.

We believe it's time for the Maryland General Assembly to take action on meaningful juvenile justice reform, and this bill will help make that happen. Therefore, we respectfully urge a favorable report.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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1. <https://www.fairandjustprosecution.org/staging/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Juvenile-Life-Without-Parole-Polling-Report.pdf>
2. <https://www.fairandjustprosecution.org/staging/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/FJPBrief.TraumaPractices.9.25.pdf>